THE PROPHET

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Wa-bo-ki-e-sheik

THE LIGHT WHITE CLOUD

[*A Medicine Man*]

H. B. PRICE

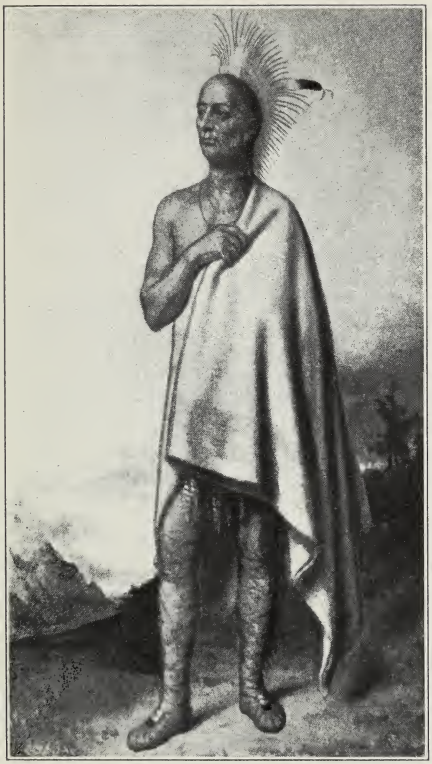
NOTE

An effort is made in these few pages to assemble the historic facts about White Cloud, the Prophet for whom Prophetstown was named. No pretension is made for originality in what is said. Beyond a sentence or two in two or three places to connect related thought, it is not comment nor discussion. The facts were gleaned from these sources:

Hodge, Handbook of American Indians; The George Catlin Indian Gallery; Drake's Book of Indians; Wakefield, History of the Black Hawk War; Stevens, The Black Hawk War; Black Hawk's Autobiography; Thwaites, The Black Hawk War. The Story of Col. Gratiot's escape from the Indians at Prophetstown was told by Hon. Elihu Washburne, and is found in Bent's History of Whiteside County, and in Stevens' Black Hawk War.

The picture of the Prophet is from a photograph by Ray Hart of the painting by Healy.

H. B. PRICE.



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"He ruled a village on Rock River, thirty-five miles from the mouth of that river, at the site of the present village of Prophetstown, Illinois."

His mother was a Sauk, his father a Winnebago. His Indian name Wa-bo-ki-e-shiek means The Light or White Cloud, and when given the English name he was White Cloud. Being a medicine man he was a prophet, and, as with white men, when he had a title he was most often given the title, The Prophet. His relation to the two tribes, his office as prophet, and his native ability, his shrewdness and power of oratory, all combined to give him great influence over both the Sauks and the Winnebagos.

He is reputed to have been an uncompromising enemy of the white people, and according to their way of thinking, a mischief maker.

"To this man is ascribed the concluding prophecies that led Black Hawk to believe he could succeed in regaining the Sauk village at Rock Island."

"Here (at Prophetstown) the scheme of revolt against the government was completed."

—**George Catlin Indian Gallery.**

However, two men who knew him and who were closely associated with him testify to acts of friendship to the white people.

Major Thomas Forsyth, a half brother of John Kinzie of Fort Dearborn fame, and the Government agent for the Sauks and Foxes from 1819 to 1830, says (page 580 in Waubun, also Red Men of Iowa, pages 269-272), "Many a good meal has the Prophet given to people travelling past his village, and very many stray horses has he recovered from the Indians, and restored to their rightful owners, without asking any recompense whatever."

The Gratiots relate a story of the friendly visits of the Prophet to Col. Gratiot while on hunting expeditions.

(The account of Col. Gratiot is reserved for its chronological place in the story.)

How The Black Hawk War Came On

Neapope, Black Hawk's lieutenant, went to Malden, Canada, to consult the British authorities in regard to the right of the Sauks to retain their lands on Rock River. On his way back to Black Hawk, who was at the site of Old Fort Madison, on the west side of the Mississippi River, near the mouth of the Des Moines (Thwaites, p. 134), Neapope stopped at the Prophet's village, and there spent the winter of 1831-32. He gave glowing reports of proffered aid from the British and the Winnebagos, Ottawas, Chippewas and the Potawatomis, in regaining the village. (Thwaites, page 132). The Prophet is said to have performed some incantations, had several visions, and prophesied that if Black Hawk would move against the whites he would be joined by the Great Spirit and a large army which would enable him to overcome the whites and regain possession of his old village.

—Handbook, Vol. II, page 886.

In his Autobiography, Black Hawk says that when Neapope reached him, "He informed me, that the Prophet was anxious to see me, as he had much good news to tell me, and that I would hear good news in the Spring from our British father. 'The Prophet requested me to inform you of all the particulars. I would much rather, however, you should see him, and learn all from himself. But I will tell you that he has received expresses from our British father, who says that he is going to send us guns, ammunition, provisions, and clothing early in the spring. The vessels that bring them will come by way of Mil-wa-ke (Milwaukee). The Prophet has likewise received wampum and tobacco from the different nations on the lakes—Ottawas, Potawatomis, and as for the Winnebagos, he has them all at his command. We are going to be happy once more'."

The advice of White Cloud was, that Black Hawk should proceed to the Prophet's town the following spring and raise a crop of corn, assurances being given him that by autumn the several allies, armed and equipped by the British, would be ready to join the Sauk leader in a general movement against the whites in the valley of the Rock.

—Thwaites, page 133.

Black Hawk Crosses The Mississippi

"On the sixth of April, 1832, Black Hawk and Neapope, with about five hundred warriors (chiefly Sauks), their squaws and children, and all their possessions, crossed the Mississippi at the Yellow Banks, opposite the present site of Oquaqua, Henderson County, and invaded the State of Illinois. For various reasons Black Hawk had concluded that the rep-

resentations of Neapope and the Prophet were exaggerated. But the Prophet met him at the Yellow Banks, and gave him such positive assurance of ultimate success, that the misguided Sauk confidently and leisurely continued his journey."

Black Hawk says in his Autobiography, "The Prophet then addressed my braves and warriors. He told them to follow us, and act like braves, and we had nothing to fear, but much to gain. That the American War chief might come, but would not, nor dare not, interefere with us so long as we acted peaceably. That we were not yet ready to act otherwise. We must wait until we ascend Rock River and receive our reinforcements, and we will then be able to withstand any army."

Black Hawk Progresses Up Rock River

Black Hawk proceeded up the east bank of Rock River as far as the Prophet's town—some four hundred fifty of his braves being well mounted, while the others, with the women, children, and equipage, occupied the canoes. The intention of the invaders was, as stated before, to raise a crop with the Rock River Winnebagos at or immediately above the Prophet's town, and prepare for the war-path in the fall, when there would be a supply of provisions.

The Indians Come To Prophetstown

According to Wakefield, Black Hawk reached the Prophet's town on April 26, 1832. "On the 26th Mr. Gratiot saw at a distance, about two miles down Rock River, the army of the celebrated Black Hawk, consisting of about five hundred Sacs, well armed and mounted on fine horses, moving in a line of battle—their

appearance was terrible in the extreme. Their bodies were painted with white clay, with an occasional impression of their hands about their bodies, colored black. About their ankles and bodies they wore wreaths of straw, which always indicated a disposition for blood."

—**Wakefield's History of the Black Hawk War, Page 30.**

Black Hawk Spends a Week At Prophetstown

Black Hawk tarried a week at the Prophet's town, holding fruitless councils with the wily and vacillating Winnebagos. (Thwaites, Page 148). From here he proceeded to Sycamore Creek (Stillman's Run).

Col. Gratiot's Mission To The Prophet

The military forces at Fort Armstrong kept close watch on the movements of Black Hawk and his band. General Henry Atkinson arrived at Fort Armstrong on the night of April 12th and assumed command. Soon afterward General Atkinson went to Fort Crawford. There he requested Col. Henry Gratiot to go to the Prophet and try to induce him to dissuade Black Hawk from his march and to return to the west side of the Mississippi.

Col. Gratiot started on April 16th with one white man. On the 19th he arrived at the Turtle village of the Winnebagos. He was delayed here until the 22nd. Here twenty-four Winnebago chiefs and head men joined him. Among them were Broken Shoulder, Whirling Thunder, White Crow, Little Medicine Man and Little Priest. They rode to Dixon where canoes were taken and they continued on the way to the

Prophet's village, arriving there on the 25th. On landing, though he carried a flag of truce, Col. Gratiot was surrounded by hostile Sacs, who with every demonstration of violence, made him a prisoner. Black Hawk, himself, who had hoisted the British flag supervising the incident, and evil times had certainly fallen on Col. Gratiot, had not the Prophet, seeing the danger of his agent, rushed to his rescue, crying, "Good man, good man, my friend. I take him to my wigwam. I feed him. He be good friend to my Indians."

When the Prophet had him securely in his wigwam, Col. Gratiot explained the peaceful object of his mission and the perfidy of the Indians if they refused to deal honorably with him. He further sought, with all the eloquence and logic he could master, to dissuade the Prophet and Black Hawk from their unrighteous expedition. The Prophet listened attentively, but if any impression had been made on him it was not noticeable in word or action, and neither could he be persuaded to try to influence Black Hawk to give up his mad enterprise. However, as a friend, the Prophet was determined to save Col. Gratiot's life, if such a thing were possible. He kept him in his wigwam for two or three days, watching for an opportunity to free him. The ferocious Sacs clamored louder each hour for scalps, and no doubt would have succeeded in taking them had not the Prophet seduced them away temporarily by promises till the desired opportunity should arrive. Returning hastily on the 27th he said to Col. Gratiot, "Chouteau (Col. Gratiot's Indian name), you have always been my friend and the friend of my people, and you and your party must not be harmed, but there is great trouble. My young men will never consent to give you up, so you must

leave without their knowledge. Your canoes are on the shore; go to them at the moment when I shall indicate and leave instantly, and go with all speed—like wild fire—for the young men will give you chase. All will depend on the strength of your arms."

The signal was given, and scarcely had the canoes been launced when an alarm in the village brought the Sacs and the young Winnebagos to the river, where a wild war whoop was sounded and an exciting chase down Rock River was begun to capture Col. Gratiot. Gratiot's men pulled for their lives, first losing and then gaining. The maddened Sacs whooped and shrieked with anger at the possible miscarriage of their plans as they lent renewed vigor to their strokes, but a sense of overwhelming danger put courage and strength into the oars of the pursued and they finally distanced their pursuers, arriving safely at Fort Armstrong on April 27th, unnerved and exhausted, to report that nothing could be done by moral suasion to prevent the advance of Black Hawk and that nothing but force would avail.

(As told by Hon. E. B. Washburn, Col. Gratiot's son-in-law. Stevens, Pages 112-115.)

The Army Comes To Prophetstown

Black Hawk and his band were followed by an army of two parts which started from Fort Armstrong. Brigadier-General Samuel Whiteside led some twelve or thirteen hundred mounted soldiers along the trail east of Rock River. General Atkinson led three hundred volunteer footmen and four hundred regular infantry up the river in canoes. The infantry was directly under command of Colonel Zachary Taylor. They started on the ninth day of May. When Gen-

eral Whiteside reached the Prophet's town he found it deserted. He burned the village and then pushed on to Dixon's.

From Prophetstown To The Battle Of Bad Axe

In the account of Black Hawk's flight, commonly called the Black Hawk War, the Prophet is not mentioned till they reach the Mississippi River, but it is very probable that he was near Black Hawk throughout the entire movement.

From the fourteenth of May, the date of the skirmish at Sycamore Creek (Stillman's Valley), they were till the first of August reaching the Mississippi, arriving at a point about two miles below the mouth of Bad Axe Creek.

Throughout this two and a half months Black Hawk's forces and people were scattered in several small bands, but they spread out over a considerable portion of northwestern Illinois and the southwestern part of what is now Wisconsin, going as far north as the present site of Madison. They then moved as rapidly as they could go toward the Mississippi, reaching a point about two miles below the mouth of Bad Axe Creek, July 31.

From The Dalles Of Wisconsin To Jefferson Barracks

After the Battle of Bad Axe, which occurred on August 1st and 2nd, Black Hawk gathered a party of ten warriors, among whom was the Prophet, and with these and about thirty-five squaws and children, headed east for a rocky hiding-place at the Dalles of the

Wisconsin whither some Winnebagos offered to guide them.

On the twenty-seventh of August, Chaeter and One-eyed Decorah, two Winnebago braves desirous of displaying their newly inspired loyalty to the Americans, and for a reward of twenty horses given by General Atkinson at Dixon, delivered Black Hawk, the Prophet and Neapope into the hands of General Street, the Indian Agent at Prairie du Chien, they having found Black Hawk and his few companions at the Dalles, above the site of the Delles of Wisconsin.

From Prairie du Chien, Black Hawk, the Prophet, Neapope and three others were taken to Fort Armstrong. There a treaty of peace was signed on the twenty-first of September, 1832. The three were held as hostages for the good behavior of the small remnant of the British band and their Winnebago allies.

From Fort Armstrong they were taken to Jefferson Barracks, near St. Louis, where they were kept through the winter.

Journey To Washington

One of the few things people learn about Black Hawk is, that, in the spring of 1832, he was taken to Washington and on a tour of eastern cities to be shown the white man's cities and their power. The Prophet was with Black Hawk on this tour. At the time of the visit Black Hawk was first presented to the President, then the Prophet, who made this speech, which, according to Catlin, is a model of brevity and frankness:

"We expected to return immediately to our people. The war in which we have been involved was occasioned by our attempting to raise provisions on

our own lands, or where we thought we had a right to do so. We have lost many of our people, as well as the whites. Our tribes and families are now exposed to the attacks of our enemies, the Sioux, and the Menominees. We hope, therefore, to be permitted to return to take care of them."

But his plea was not granted.

They were sent to Fortress Monroe, where they were held as prisoners of war until the fourteenth of June.

At Norfolk, Virginia, June 5, 1833, after his release from Fortress Monroe, the Prophet addressed a mass of people from the balcony of the hotel, saying:

"Brothers, the Great Spirit sent us here, and now happily we are about to return to our own Mississippi and our own people. It affords us much happiness to rejoin our friends and kindred. We would shake hands with all our white friends assembled here. Should any of them go to our country, on the Mississippi, we would take pleasure in returning their kindness to us. We will go home with peaceable dispositions toward our white brothers, and make our conduct more satisfactory to them. We bid you all farewell, as it is the last time we shall see each other."

—**Catlin, page 32.**

Last Days

Then followed the visit to the other cities, after which they were returned to Fort Armstrong, arriving there about the first of August. They were here formally placed under the guardianship of Keokuk.

Black Hawk and his followers were placed on a small reservation set apart for them on the Des Moines River, in Davis County, Iowa, where Black Hawk died on the third of October, 1838.

The Sauks and most of the Foxes were removed to Franklin County, Kansas, in 1837, where the Prophet died in 1841.

—Handbook, page 886.

(Catlin, page 33, says the Prophet died about 1847.)

Personal Appearance And Pictures Of The Prophet

Those who saw the Prophet and were associated with him have left us a written description of his personal appearance, and two portraits of him were painted from life by talented artists.

"He (the Prophet) is described as being six feet tall, stout and athletic of figure, with a countenance in keeping with his militant disposition."

—Handbook of American Indians, Vol. II. Page 886.

"He (the Prophet) has a large, broad mouth, short blunt nose, large full eyes, broad mouth, thick lips, with a full suit of hair. He wore a white cloth headdress, which rose several inches above the top of his head, the whole exhibiting a deliberate savageness—not that he would seem to delight in honorable war, or fight, but marking him as the priest of assassination or secret murder. He had in one hand a white flag. * * * * He was clothed in very white dressed deerskins, fringed at the seams with cuttings of the same. This description was written before any portrait or engraving was made of him.

"He carried with him a huge pipe, a yard in length, with the stem ornamented with the neck feathers of a duck, and beads and ribands of various colors.

To its center was attached a fan of feathers. He wears his hair long all over his head".

—**Drake's Book of the Indians, Part IV, page 163.**

While Black Hawk, the Prophet, and ten other warriors were detained as prisoners of war at Jefferson Barracks in the fall of 1832, Catlin visited them. He says:

"We were immediately struck with admiration at the gigantic and symmetrical figures of most of these warriors, who seemed, as they reclined in native ease and gracefulness, with their half-naked bodies exposed to view, rather like statues from some master hand than like beings of a race whom we had heard characterized as degenerate and debased. * * * * They were clad in leggings and moccasins of buckskin, and wore blankets, which were thrown around them in the manner of the Roman Toga, so as to leave their right arm bare".

Here Catlin painted the pictures of Black Hawk, the Prophet, and the other ten, which pictures are now in the National Museum at Washington.

The picture of the Prophet is in conformity with the description given above by Drake. With his left hand and fore arm horizontally in front of him, he holds the stem of his long pipe so the ribands, feathers and fan are visible. His hair completely covers his head; he wears a necklace of beads, and a garment of buckskin which covers his shoulders and arms.

While Black Hawk and the Prophet were at Fortress Monroe, R. M. Sully painted the Prophet's picture. Here he wears a full suit of hair, the necklace of beads and what seems to be a robe over his should-

ers. This picture is in the possession of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

The picture by Catlin and that by Sully show facial features and expression as much alike as one can expect in two pictures painted by two artists at different times and places. The expression of both is pleasing, there being none of the "countenance of a militant disposition."

The picture of the Prophet, which hangs in the Board of Supervisors' room in the Court House at Morrison, was presented to Whiteside County by the Honorable E. B. Washburne, October 24, 1877. The picture was painted by the noted artist Healy, in Paris, and is a composition made from the paintings made from life by Catlin. Mr. Washburne, a resident of Galena, was for a number of years the Representative in Congress of the district of which Whiteside County was a part. At the time of the presentation of the picture he was the Minister of the United States to France.